Chapter 1

Water rushed over the man's head, plunging him downwards.
The S.S Hortensia's lights shone dimly, a small beacon of hope as the drowning man desperately paddled water to reach it. Another forceful ocean wave submerged his head and he sputtered to breathe.
The salt water burning his nostrils.
"Help!" he cried.
In this furious storm no one would hear him.
Even they had hearing as keen as a bat's. The ebony sky acted as a black hole, doubled with the navy blue ocean.
Suddenly, something wrapped around the man's ankle, and he was pulled down at an incredible speed.
Wildly kicking to free himself, his foot made contact with the foreign object and it immediately let go.
Clambering through the water to reach the surface, the man broke through and inhaled a massive gulp.
What had just attacked him?
The man decided not to waste time thinking about it as he slapped water trying to reach the ship.
Then, as if back for revenge, the thing attacked him again, this time pulling him down and refusing to let go.
The man could not do a thing as the cold water began to freeze his limbs. Like a trapped wild cat, he thrashed around in the water.
A strange feeling came over him as the water turned dry, and was replaced with air...

"Daniel..." a voice called from the void.

Daniel gasped and opened his eyes to see a faint glowing candle.
Behind it was The Baron of Brennenburg, Alexander.
He was dressed in elegant night robes.

"Still having nightmares I see." he said nonchalantly, straightening up.

"Yes," Daniel panted, "they come every night."

"I know. Your feral shrieking and screaming can be heard on the next floor where I study. You are disturbing my servants." he scolded, his eyes were dark where the candlelight did not shine. It was an eerie thing look upon.

"I'm sorry. I've tried everything Dr. Tate suggested."

"Perhaps. Why don't you spend the night with me. If you begin to have nightmares I shall wake you before they go too far." he offered, moving toward the door.

"All right." Daniel agreed, slipping out of bed. He then realized his night clothes were soaked in sweat.

"Perhaps you should change, I do not fancy a moist bed."

Alexander sneered, the candlelight grew dim as he moved down the corridor.
Daniel wrenched the shirt from his body and quickly pulled on fresh clothes before the light faded completely.
Brennenburg was surprisingly busy the more Alexander and Daniel moved away from this chambers. The servants were busy in the dark, and Daniel tried to keep his head by not looking.
Their faces were quite gruesome to look upon.
Many of them went quiet as they passed, and a few uttered disturbing growls.
Daniel sought to Alexander's side for comfort. Alexander's room was grand and elegant as much as he was himself.
Daniel looked up in awe at the cathedral ceilings and towering bookshelves.
The bed was massive, and coated in luxurious blankets and furs.

"Try not to be nuisance then, I do have a lot to accomplish."

Alexander warned, moving back to the small workplace he had set up on the bed.
A few layers of parchment were spread across the wrinkled surface.
Daniel crawled beneath the many sheets of blankets and nestled in.

The Baron paid him little attention as he began to work.

After a few minutes of laying with his eyes closed, Daniel realized he could not get to sleep. Sitting up and leaning back against the headboard, he eyed Alexander's work.
Much of the text was in German, he had no knowledge of the language.
Rubbing his eyes he gave a frustrated sigh.

"Having trouble getting to sleep now, Daniel?" Alexander gazed at him.

His eyes looked oddly...hungry from over the rim of his reading glasses.

"Uh, yes. I am."

"Well then," the baron left the bed, "I can make a cup of herbal tea if that helps." he offered.

"Oh, yes please." Daniel flushed, feeling odd from being waited on by this older man.

Alexander mixed the tea in plain view, then he turned to block Daniel's view from the cup. Turning around after adding something, he brought over two cups.
He held out a plate. Daniel cautiously took one, murmuring a thank you.
For a while, the young Englishman stared into the cup*. I wonder...* He thought.
He snuck a look at the baron, who was sipping from his cup without worry.

"Drink it Daniel, before it gets cold or you will have wasted it." he snapped without looking.

Daniel flinched slightly, before taking a hesitant sip. In thirty seconds, he had downed the tea.

"There, what did you think? It was poisoned?" Alexander chuckled. Daniel froze.

Why would he say that after I had drunken it?

"No, of course not." he lied.

Scooting away from the baron, he placed the empty cup on the nightstand. In about a few minutes, Daniel's vision grew blurry, and his body numb.
Soon after that, his body fell limp against the mattress. Alexander's eyes slowly roved over to the young man.
Setting down his tea and moving the parchments aside, he grabbed Daniel's body and pulled him closer.

"Now, let's see what you have under these clothes, shall we?" he purred sinisterly.

Daniel lurched awake, and was instantly blinded by sunlight*. Oh gosh, I must've overslept.*

"Come on, Daniel!" an impatient voice from the door snapped.
It was Alexander, standing fully clothed in his robes and glaring.

"Sorry, that tea must've been too strong for me." The baron chuckled lowly.

"Oh, no, it was to perfection." he mumbled.

"What did you say?" Daniel asked.

"I said move along or I shall leave without you. We're burning daylight."

Alexander began to leave the room. Just before he left, he poked half his head from behind the door.

"And Daniel..." he said oddly, "I believe you should have that cut on your hip tended to."

Chapter 2

Daniel did not rush through the Victorian style corridors. He took his time gawking foolishly at everything.

Whenever a servant happened to go by, he would push himself into the wall and look away, cringing at the horrid noises that emitted from them.

The young Englishman was in no hurry to find Alexander.

Although, the Baron usually had breakfast on the highest balcony, overlooking a great stretch of Prussia. The servants avoided the higher levels of the castle, for the light streamed in easily over the trees and permeated through the towering window panes.

Daniel surmised that they did not enjoy light at all.

The creatures were found most often in the archives, or darker parts of the castle.

After climbing another mountainous case of stairs, Daniel halted to rest.

The room beyond was where Alexander would be.

The man gave a shudder.

What happened the other night? Did he put something into my tea? Or was I just exhausted?

Getting to his feet, he grasped the curved knob and pulled the door out to enter.

He could see the veranda doors open, revealing a wooden table covered in breakfast items. To the left of the doors, where a sliver of darkness dwelled, a servant stood, pushing himself into the shadows. It watched Daniel with curiosity as the man walked by, head down.

I'll be watching his every move this time. He promised.

Stepping out into the glowing sunshine, he looked to Alexander.

The old man sat elegantly, his white hair without a strand out of place, and sipping a shot glass of... whiskey Daniel had to assume.

"Whiskey at this time, Alexander?" Daniel inquired, sitting down, he hungrily eyed the bacon, still sizzling with heat. Somewhere in a tree two angry birds tittered to one another.

"If you had any mind for time, Daniel," the baron said, gazing up to the sun, "you would see that it is nearly eleven in morning." the Englishman flinched in surprise.

"Is it really?" he stuttered. The Baron chuckled deeply and humorlessly.

"Yes, and I've already attended to fixing the study in the west hall.

As you were still sleeping quite soundly." he murmured, taking another entire shot.

The whiskey bottle was nearly three fourths empty.

And he still isn't drunk. Daniel thought.

"Well don't sit there like a bump on a log, Daniel, help yourself then get to work!" Alexander ordered briskly, it had startled Daniel.

"Oh, thank you." he said. Alexander gave a humph of acknowledgment.

The Englishman added some food to a small plate and reached for the kettle of tea.

Suddenly, he froze. *What's in it this time?* He jested grimly.

Pulling away, he began to wonder if anything else had been tampered with.

Oh what am I getting so paranoid about? I was probably hallucinating if nothing. He thought.

Pouring some tea into his cup, his mind rolled around back to what Alexander had said earlier. About the cut on his hip.

How did he know? I got that working outside, there's no reason why he should've seen it.

"Alexander..." he began slowly, unsure of how to word this.

He did not want to set anything off.

"What?" the baron responded.

"This morning...when you said I should get the cut on my hip tended to... why?"

That was horrible. I've probably offended him. Alexander glared.

"Well Daniel, cuts can get infected. I assume you received such an injury while fixing the doors down below, am I wrong?"

"No, but-"

"I'm only concerned for your safety, Daniel, but if you do not want my sympathy you will not have it!" he snapped, highly irritated.

I've offended him.

"I-I understand, sorry I just...never mind..." Daniel cringed, finishing off his breakfast.

A few tense and silent minutes died away before the Baron snapped his fingers.

The servant from the shadows came into view, shying away from the intense rays of the sun.

"Take Daniel down to the machine room. I want that damn elevator back in use before dusk."

He ordered sharply. The creature whimpered and began to hurry back into the room, desperate to escape the light.

Daniel lurched from his chair and went to follow before he lost track of it.

"Daniel," Alexander said. The man halted inside.

"Yes, Alexander?" the old man stood up and sauntered to Daniel.

He stood impressively taller than the Englishman.

His long and skeletal fingers slipped around his chin.

"I'll be down later to check on your progress." he whispered, leaning close.

Daniel shrunk back an inch.

"Yes." he said stupidly. Alexander gave a chuckle, this one amused, and different.

"Go." he said, turning away. Daniel nodded, and darted off to find the servant.

What a strange man!

Chapter 3

Daniel followed the disfigured servant all the way to the machine room far below the castle. It was dead silent, for none of the machinery was currently in operating stages. A few dimly lit lanterns guided them down the spiraling stairs. The

disgruntled servant then began to hurry away, far from Daniel, muttering and growling unintelligibly to itself.

"All right, let's get to work!" he said to himself.

He lifted a large cogwheel, holding it up to his face and studying it.

"Hmmm..." he hummed. "Maybe I should've paid more attention to Herbert's stories." he thought.

What was wrong with Alexander this morning? I cannot believe that merely inquiring how he knew of my injury would upset or offend him. After all, the only way he would be able to see an injury on my hip is if -

A loud bang jolted him out of this thoughts, and his skin. He waited for a moment, hiding in a tangle of pipes. It was silent for an eternity, but Daniel strained to hear anything else.

A small shudder danced over his skin as his heart thudded in anticipation. I must be hearing things. He thought, rising to his feet. Stepping back over the pipes he went to install the cogwheel onto the spoke. The hair on the back of his neck suddenly rose.

"Daniel." a deep voice had the young man shrieking as he whipped around to face a rather apathetic Alexander.

"Fooling around will not be tolerated." he said.

Reaching into his coat pocket he pulled out a slip of stained and battered parchment.

"I found this in an advanced mechanics manual. I believe it would be quite beneficial to you. I also came down here to assist you. Perhaps it would expedite this task. I have another for you anyhow." he said.

His voice was calming to Daniel as he bent forward and picked up the cogwheel that had lurched out of his hands when Alexander frightened him.

"R-right, thank you." he said, positioning it just right. Alexander took a seat on a box and unraveled the paper.

"I'll instruct you." he spoke. Looking to a lever, he ordered, "turn that down, or else the entire machine will backfire upon turning it on."

Daniel frowned slightly, but did as he was told. He felt Alexander's piercing gaze on his body.

"Have you filled the burner with coal?"

"Yes, I have." he responded coolly.

"Is it on?"

"Well, yes..."

"Turn it off you fool!" Alexander snapped.

"Right, right!" Daniel scampered over and pulled the giant lever down.

Alexander's eyes rarely left Daniel, not even to read from the instructions.

After an hour of serving Alexander's every beck and whim, Daniel fell to the floor, sweating and exhausted.

Alexander hadn't moved since he sat down, until now. He rose.

"Well done, Daniel..." he smiled eerily.

His hands slipped beneath Daniel's arms and lifted him up with impressive strength for an old man. Putting his right arm tightly around Daniel's shoulders, he led him upstairs.

Chapter 4

In the parlor, Daniel was offered sweets and tea.

He politely refused everything. In his mind, he was uncertain of Alexander's bizarre motives lately. The sun was still streaming in with it's last few bands of light. All of the servants were absent from this floor.

"Here you are Daniel." Alexander purred. He seemed to be in a most gleeful mood this evening. Daniel couldn't help but be suspicious.

"The archives are next if you were interested." he took a sip of the tea. Daniel sniffed his carefully. It smelled quite ordinary.

"It's vanilla tea, Daniel. The scent is rather absent." he said, almost reading the Englishman's thoughts. Daniel smiled awkwardly.

"Right." he mumbled. The window beside them was open and a frequent warm breeze would rustle his hair. But not Alexander's. He was sitting just out of shot of the breezes.

"Your cheeks are rather flushed." he noticed, starting Daniel. "Are you feeling well?" he smiled oddly and took another sip.

"I'm fine, t-the tea's hot."

"Mmm, but you haven't even taken a sip." Daniel froze. His heart thudded a little faster.

"Don't lie to me Daniel. There's no one around for miles...you don't have to lie to me." he gave a leery gaze from over his teacup. Daniel slowly took a sip. Just before the liquid entered his mouth, he pursed his lips together. He pretended to swallow and set it down.

"It's good." he said. Alexander gave a large grin, evidently he believed the young man had taken a drink.

Suddenly, he leapt to his feet. Daniel flinched slightly and watched him.

The Baron made his way around the Englishman's chair, setting his fingers delicately upon his tense shoulders.

"You are a pleasing person, Daniel." he spoke.

Slowly, his fingers began to rub his skin around.

"I was afraid this would not follow through to my standards, but we seemed to have surpassed them." his fingers ground deep into Daniel's aching muscles.

The sensation had his eyes closing.

What is he doing!? He wondered, though it felt really good at the moment.

Alexander's hands slid down his back, a little lower...

Instantly, Daniel shot off his chair. Alexander looked taken aback as he stared idly at him.

"Uh, I have to use the privy." he said in a rush as he took off to the door.

"Daniel-" Daniel didn't stay a moment longer.

He had shut the door and bolted off down the corridor, rounding into a room and hiding there for a brief moment. From the room he had just escaped, he heard the door open.

Thank the lord I hid in here. If I didn't he would still see me barreling down the corridor.

After a tense minute, he heard the door finally close shut.

Cautiously, he poked his head around the corner.

Nothing.

Letting out a heavy sigh, he went to the the Entrance Hall.

Chapter 5

Daniel lingered around for a bit. Pretending to be absolutely fascinated by the objects around him. Anything that would delay him in returning to Alexander.

He is acting strange.

Daniel thought idly. Well, stranger than usual. He passed a statue of a twisted stone snake with a infant's face on the end. Daniel shuddered and moved faster down the carpeted corridor.

At least the servant seem to have dispersed. Must be getting late.

I should probably get to bed soon...although... the nightmares... will they return? He managed to stumble back into the study, where coincidently, Alexander was placidly examining a few scrolls, maps and assorted documents.

"Ah, Daniel, there you are." He said, voice stern and far from the lusty rasps earlier.

"Oh, yes... I, uh was using the privy."

"I know. You told me before you bolted out of here like a lunatic. I was only trying to help you relax, but if you want to flap around like a demented bird, so be it."

Daniel felt a sharp sting in his chest. He can make one feel guilty about anything.

"My apologies, Alexander. I was a bit flighty. The servants startle me."

"Really? You don't seem to have much of a problem with them when I'm around?"

He shrugged absently and continued scrawling a note in German.

"Well come sit if you must. No reason to linger about by the door." his voice almost as if he had pushed him forward.

"If you insist." he said politely. Alexander waved his hand low, gesturing toward some tea and coffee.

"Help yourself, it's an exceptional brew." he complimented, giving a rather warm smile. Daniel shook his head.

"No thank you." Alexander smirked and propped a book against a vase.

"Suit yourself, but you'll regret it later." he smiled, still scribbling.

Daniel's eyes searched his...stabbing into Alexander's eyes, desperately searching for deception.

Those warm brown eyes hid nothing.

Daniel sighed and argued in his head.

All right, this is incredibly risky...and foolish... He wanted to strike himself.
If the tea is another sleep inducing concotion I will never drink here again! *And if not, then maybe I'm just going insane.*

He shivered to that last thought.

Preposterous, but I must know the truth. And I cannot ask him.

He poured himself some gingery smelling tea and took a big sip, tasting and savoring it in his mouth, searching for something awry.

Alexander did not notice, nor did he pay much attention to him. Daniel undid the buttons on his coat, stripping it quietly.
Alexander glanced up for a moment, his expression indifferent.

"I-it's a bit hot in here." Daniel explained himself.
Alexander shrugged a shoulder half heartedly.

"I suppose. But I haven't moved myself in a good hour." he said.

Daniel blushed, feeling foolish, but he needed to investigate.

"What time is it?" he asked, merely curious this time. Alexander glanced over his shoulder.

"Quarter to twelve." he answered.

"Already? Well, I suppose I should turn in now." he said, rising up from the chair.

"Indeed." Alexander began to answer him brusquely. Then his face contorted as if he discovered something incredible.

"How are your nightmares? Subsided?" Daniel's chest soared.

"No. They're still frequent and frightening."

"I see." the baron crossed his legs and tilted a book up to copy the page.

"You may return to your chambers if you feel comfortable." he offered.

Daniel's brow furrowed.

"I'll think about it. I don't want to slip into the habit again."

"Well, you're free to stay in my room if you are too disturbed to remain alone."

Daniel nodded, feeling slightly victorious.

"Thank you. May I tonight?"

"Yes, yes, but do keep quiet. I have a many things to do into the later hours of the night."

He responded, still not looking as Daniel changed over into looser clothing to sleep.

"I won't be a nuisance." he said, keeping his eyes on the baron to see if he would peek at him undressing.

He didn't.

The more he failed to catch him at something suspicious or unusual, the more foolish he felt. He tucked deep into the soft dry blankets of the bed and picked a book up from the nightstand, pretending to read. He couldn't read it if he tried. It was all in some Russian or Prussian text.

He kept his eyes over the top, watching Alexander from the far side of the room.

Another hour had passed of Daniel just staring blankly at him.

He leaned back against the bed, the frames creaking slightly.

Alexander flinched and turned.

"I thought you went to sleep a great while ago? What ails you?" Daniel shook his head.

"I just thought I'd read for a bit." he lied. Alexander gave a sly sneer.

"That book is in Russian, Daniel, I highly doubt you could if you tried." the Englishman shivered.

So he knows?

"Well, it doesn't hurt to try..." he said.

Alexander turned back around.

"Sleep Daniel, you have much to accomplish tomorrow." he insisted.

Daniel smiled deviously as another idea entered his mind.
He would pretend to sleep and wait for the baron to make a move.
He only hoped he didn't really fall asleep.
He waited another twenty minutes before he froze, hearing the chair creak from the other side.

Alexander's boots walked to the wardrobe.

Daniel listened to him change clothes, and make his way barefoot back to the bed. It sank opposite of him as the baron slipped into bed. Daniel waited...a touch...a sound....nothing.

He waited a good ten minutes before speaking,

"Alexander?" he whispered it.

Nothing.

"Alexander?" he tried slightly louder.

The baron started snoring lightly, deeply asleep.

Well...I guess I'm safe...tonight... Maybe I'm overreacting...

He rolled his eyes at his foolish thoughts and nestled in to sleep.

The bed sunk behind him.

His eyes shot open in the dark.

He was frozen in place.

It sunk all the way to his back. He could feel some mass behind him.

He forced himself not to flinch as a warm hand rested on his hip, sliding up his waist and wrapping around him.

He felt himself being pulled back against him.

A head rested behind his, breathing deeply.

I-is he asleep? Or awake? Daniel couldn't move as his mind raced in fear, wondering what Alexander was doing...

Chapter 6

He forced himself not to flinch again as the older man moaned into his hair, his hand beginning to grope up his side.

"Let's see what you hide under these clothes." he whispered to himself.

He rolled Daniel over onto his back and slowly lifted up his shirt.

Daniel snapped.

He would not have this. He shoved Alexander away from him and fell back onto the floor.

The candle on the baron's side flickered from the thud.

"Wha-what do you think you're doing?!" Daniel cried, shaking a little in fear. A

lexander frowned, but his face was blacked out from the lack of light, and he could not tell his expressions.

"So...you were awake the whole time?" his voice was dark and omnious.

Daniel gave a shiver and backed away against the wall.

Slowly, Alexander rose from the bed, but like a viper, he thrashed Daniel against the wall.

"How dare you deceive me!" he hissed.

His surprisingly strong arms threw the young man back onto the bed as he pounced on him, holding his shoulders down.

Is he going to kill me?! Daniel thought, worry blurring his thoughts.

Without thinking, Daniel brought his knee up into the elder man's groin.

Alexander gave a hoot of pain and anger, but was thrown aside by Daniel in the next second as the petrified Englishman dashed from the room as if the devil was on his heels.

"Get back here Daniel!"

The Baron cried in an eerie bellow.

Daniel's eyes were wide in terror as he sprinted barefoot down the carpeted corridor, making his way to the main Entrance.

He dared not to hide within the castle.

Rather, he sped to a small warbdrobe beside the door and hastily threw on a heavy coat and boots. He could feel his chest compressing with each shaky breath he drew.

His mind spun when he caught Alexander's dark figure over the balcony.

Daniel's heart gave a lurch as he swung open the heavy door and bolted out into the heavy rain, disregarding the slippery terrain as he made for the nearest village...Altstadt.

Alexander stood fully dressed in his salmon colored robe in the foyer.

His eyes narrowed dark slits as he gazed at the door viciously swinging on its hinges, rain coating the carpet and stone floor near it.

His hands were clasped behind his back in an intimidating form.

Nearby, a servant grunt hobbled its way to him and whimpered. A strange strangled pant emitting from its throat.

"Go after him...do not let him get to the village. I will not have any unwelcome visitors probing where they should not..." he spoke quietly, but fiercely.

The creature gave a soft submissive sigh and gathered two more standing in the shadows. Alexander's eyes watched as they disappeared into the whipping wind and rain.

None had the mind to close the door behind them.

The Baron rolled his eyes and went to bar the door shut again.

The heavy rain pounded against the wood, some rain water spraying onto his robe as he forced it shut against the wind.

"Bloody weather..."

Chapter 7

Daniel's heart pounded in his ears, even over the sound of the roaring rain.

He whipped his head in the other direction and saw the dim lights of Brennenburg growing fainter and fainter.

His throat seared in burning pain as he panted and sprinted hysterically into the neighboring woodland. Luckily, his voyage here had brought him through the closest village, Altstadt.

Suddenly, his foot snagged a stray root and he went sailing down into the dirt below him.

He felt his knee scrape across the ground and rip the fabric of his trousers.

"Damn!" he cursed under the breath he had left.

Leaping to his feet, he hobbled for a moment before regaining his senses and began to tear through the woods.

He couldn't remember how far the journey was from Brennenburg to Altstadt.

He had fallen asleep in the carriage while reading one of Herbert's journals.

A chill ran through him as he thought of the gatherers.

Stopping dead, he froze and listened. He had forgotten about Alexander's warnings.

'Keep out of the forest, particularly at night. My gatherers are none too bright and will easily mistake you for a target. I will not be there swift enough to collect you should it happen...'

Daniel hunkered down and closed his eyes, trying to heighten his other senses.

He didn't know if the rain was strong enough to rid the gatherers of the rotting stench imbedded in their skin.

But he'd definitely hear them.

They would growl, hiss, and make other strange neither human nor animal like noises.

Some weren't graceful either. Daniel heard nothing but the drenching rain and decided to press on. He examined his scraped knee and wiped off the blood.

It was merely a few nasty scratches, nothing to worry about now. Jus then, he heard a horrid growl.

Dropping to soaked forest floor, he moved for cover under a few fanned out ferns.

He watched and waited with mounting terror.

If they find me...if they find me... No. Calm down, they will just take you to Brennenburg. At least... I hope that's all they do.

Another growl, this one louder and closer, made Daniel flinch.

There was one right on top of him but he couldn't see it. He was suddenly glad he had fallen in the dirt. All the wet muck and mud had camouflaged his body to an extent.

In an instant, two grunts passed in front of him.

Their jaws slacking down against the chests, a sickening mockery of a human body.

Daniel clamped his hand over his mouth to prevent sounds of fear from escaping his lips.

For a moment the grunts made odd wheezing sounds to one another.

One looked about anxiously.

The young Englishman wondered how good their smell was, but no matter, the ground and rain was sure to cover up his scent as well.

One of the grunts took a step back, nearly a foot from Daniel's face.

The man cringed back and looked up the leg of the grunt.

Obviously their eyesight was something terrible, for the one in front of it did see the man lying in the ferns just behind the other.

The one in front of Daniel twisted its leg westbound and began to hobble that way.

The one left behind turned east and began to move, with no complications walking, that way.

Daniel was wise enough to wait until either was well out of sight and range of hearing before he bolted up. His eyes scanned the wood desperately. His clothes clung icily to his skin and had him shivering*. Th-this way...* He thought to himself.

He remembered how many fallen trees there were on his way to Brennenburg.

Herbert had told him Altstadt was looking to increase the village size, but mysteriously halted all progress due to superstitions at Brennenburg.

Daniel held himself as he shook to the point where walking was difficult. He kept his eyes to the ground to avoid stumbling over roots, rocks and divets in the earth. Eventually his eyes glanced upwards, then back down. Then they went back up and he stopped.

There was a light in the distance. He urged himself forward and faster until he was soon running again. He ran and laughed to himself as he saw the familiar outline of Altstadt.

Daniel held back tears in his eyes though it could've easily been mistaken for rain.

Daniel soon found himself in the small village near the marketplace. It was closed down and all the fresh fruits were absent from their stands. The rain had significantly lightened to a drizzle here. For a bit, he moped around until he saw the big wooden sign hanging over the stairs to the inn. It was called the Scarlet Lady. He had heard a story about it during his travels, but had forgotten it. He trudged up the stairs and pounded on the door, uncertain it was unlocked or not. Within seconds, a tall, thin man with a bushy beard opened the door.

"May I help you?" he asked rather obtusely.

"I need a room for the night. And fresh clothes, and some care for my knee." he gestured down to his ripped pants and bloody knee.

The man leered for a moment.

"What happened to you?" he asked suspiciously.

Daniel froze. In an instant he began, "I was lost on my way to Altstadt. I got caught in the rain and lost my way. I thought it would be quicker to come through the woods." he watched the man carefully.

After a moment he nodded and held the door open for Daniel to come in.

"Welcome then, please enjoy your stay. Unfortunately we just ended with dinner rations." he said apologetically.

"That's quite all right." Daniel said truthfully.

He wasn't hungry right now, and besides, the marketplace would be open in the morning.

Although, he had no money. Daniel sat in the kitchen as a young woman tended to his knee. She was swift, but delicate.

And when she finished tightening the bandage, she smiled and offered him a fresh set of clothes. The young man had thanked her and went to his room.

He felt safe here. But not comfortable.

Daniel twisted and turned as he slept, awakened by many nightmares in a row.

He had eventually given up on sleep and merely watched the rain drip down the window in front of the bed.

Tomorrow, tomorrow I will leave. Or maybe sneak out before... I don't have any money to pay for being here...or to get out.

He slapped his hands to his face and groaned. Perhaps I can walk back to London...or something. Anything's better than Brennenburg.

Chapter 8

Daniel awoke the next morning.

His head was aching from the previous night.

Memories rushed at him as he stared in uncertainty at the unfamiliar bedspread beneath his body.

"Oh... that's right..." he murmured, rising up from the bed.

He thought to himself about how to escape the small village.

Obviously this would be the first place the Baron would look for him.

Especially since Altstadt was the only settlement around for miles.

Daniel quickly pulled on all his clothes he had escaped with.

They had dried just fine, however the mud on his fabrics was now encrusted over and he had to beat them against the inn from outside the window to remove the hardened dirt.

I have no money. I can't afford to pay for the board, even for a night. He thought to himself.

He was on a ground level room. And before he knew it, he was slinking out of the window and landing on the wet mossy ground below the window.

He heard the early morning sounds of the inn from outside.

He moved a wooden crate under the window and stood back up to close it.

After he had taken care of his sneaky business, he went further into town to either acquire some breakfast, or possibly obtain some money.

Luckily Altstadt was busy today. It meant two things.

One, if the Baron sent after him, he'd have a lot to search through.

Two, the people at the inn would have a more difficult time locating their freeloader Daniel was in luck as a fruit salesman was in mid setup of his stand.

He moved closer to one of the already set up stands to snag something.

The man was bent over a few poles on the ground, seemingly looking for something specific. He suddenly caught sight of him and looked up.

"Would you like to try a dragonfruit? Very rare around here, only five pounds."

He spoke to the Englishman. He straightened up and collected one, holding out a curious pink shell with an odd inside.

"Erm, no thanks." Daniel refused politely.

He didn't add to the fact that he had no money. Perhaps hiding that would come in handy later. The small town was alive with activity as the festivities began to take hold.

"Well feel free to take a very small sample. No charge." He smiled broadly.

His fingernails bit into a very small portion of the fruit and he offered it to Daniel.

Hate to think where those fingers have been. But I guess that's the price to pay.

He thought to himself. He smiled and thanked the man as he ate the small slice in a single bite.

"Mmmm. Very good." He appeased the man as they both returned to their business.

Yes, a small slice of a bizarre fruit will keep me sated all day. He thought sarcastically.

If I can just manage to get a ride to London.

Daniel spent nearly an hour shambling about the village.

He had many failed attempts of obtaining something that would aid him in his hindrance to progression.

He had managed to salvage nine coins.

Not nearly half of what it would cost him to get to London.

Shouts rang out from the village square. Daniel felt panic rise in his throat.

Grunts? Was his first thought. His heart thudded in fear as he moved to follow the sounds.

Another ring of shouts followed the first. H

e was able to listen more effectively this time around.

The shouts sounded excited rather than terrified. Just then, a green flare soared into the sky and erupted with a dazzle of emerald glitter.

Ah. I see. Daniel sighed in relief and sat on a shipment of crates in route to Italy.

He kept his eyes trained to the forest to reduce the distractions in his mind.

The constant sound of festival and jubliance was beginning to ride a nerve the wrong way.

Daniel rose up from the crate and went to the outskirts of the forest. It was quieter here.

The sounds of birds and the gentle breezes of the wind calmed him.

He smiled softly to himself.

Right. Now, a simple ride to London will cost nearly twenty pounds.
Maybe I can steal it, or maybe I can offer as a paid worker for one of the vendors.

More distant shouts of excitements gently nudged him from his thoughts.

At least then I can do honest business-

He suddenly thought of poor innfolk he had taken advantage of.

It'd be too strange for either party if I returned later with pay.
I will have to avoid them for as long as possible then make the break to London.

Suddenly a pale shape moved beyond in the wood.

Daniel's blood ran cold. He'd been around them long enough to recognize them.

That one was a grunt.

Reeling back in panic, he stumbled over his feet and fell onto his backside.

No! No! They're looking for me!

He instantly surmised.

Jumping to his feet, the Englishman began to run back into the center of the activity, hoping the grunts would shy from the noise and crowds.

He couldn't remember if they feared people...or not.

Daniel made it back to the town center, where some of the festivities were coming to an end. The sky was also darkening, signaling the night.

Night! Night! Night! Night! No! I need to find another place to take refuge, or get onto that coach for London or else the grunts will surely discover me!

He began to breathe rapidly in his terror as he thought of all the wretched things that could befall him if he was caught.

But what if I was mistaken? What if Alexander... No! He attacked you! You should not go back to him!

"Hey you!" a voice shouted.

It sounded like it was directed to him. Daniel wheeled around to face the man from the inn. His eyes were fiery with anger.

"You! You did not pay your fees! What kind of fools do you take us for?"

He continued to stride forward.

Something in the trees behind them rustled. Just give him the nine pounds.

Surely it accounts for something. He immediately dug into his pockets.

"Here take it. I'm sorry for the trouble." He simpered.

If anything, the bearded innkeeper grew angier.

"This is not enough! We took you in, cared for your injuries and-" suddenly the man gave a tremendous gasp and stumbled back several steps.

He was gaping like a fish as he pointed toward the treeline.

"It's a monster!" He shouted in a hoarse and petrified whisper.

Daniel felt his skin crawl everywhere as he turned about to see the grunt charging toward them.

Clearly it had been attracted by the sounds of voices.

This one did not fear people, as it came bombarding through the brush.

The bearded man took off like a galloping horse as he sped back into the light and crowd. Daniel tried to run and follow, but his body seemed to march to a different tune.

His legs were wobbly and his midsection and arms seizured in a paroxysm of terror. Suddenly, it was upon him.

The grunt crashed into him like an animal and its working arm snatched a hold of his shirt collar. Daniel screamed as they crashed to the ground.

Finally, Daniel felt his body listening to his mind again as he thrashed about, trying to free himself from the aberration.

"Somebody help me!" he screamed.

The grunt rose to its disfigured feet and held Daniel's ankle in a death grip.

It gave a small snarl and began to drag his resistant body back into the woods...back to... Brennenburg.

Chapter 9

Daniel felt his body growing sore and cut from the thick brush the stupid brute was dragging him over.

He kept his hands over his eyes to protect them from getting scratched out by the unfriendly brush.

I should struggle....I should fight! Not be dragged away like a ragdoll held carelessly by a child.

The man peeked through his fingers at the disfigured being hauling him off.

The moment he did, Daniel felt dirt and road beneath him and the scratching bushes vanished. He took his hands away and lifted his body up to see what lied ahead.

Brennenburg stood eerily in the night.

The half moon behind it illuminated the wood in a dim white glow.

The grunt continued to snarl and snort as it dragged the man along behind him.

Maybe I was being hasty... Daniel's thoughts grew desperate. *I'll beg him for forgiveness. I'll tell him it is the sedatives Doctor Tate prescribed. They make me a little loony.*

His thoughts took a turn.

But why did Alexander send the grunt after me? I'm not a prisoner to the castle? Why should it matter if I leave?

The grunt pushed through the immense doors of the castle and dragged him along a corridor to the right.

At least he won't try to drag me upstairs.

Daniel mused with grim humor. After a few more scrapes and bumps on the flagstones, the Englishman was released and the grunt turned about to face him. It whimpered and lingered for a moment before sulking off. Daniel shivered and began to examine his wounds in the candlelight.

"Daniel?" the deep voice alone gave him a shiver up his spine.

He wheeled his head about.

Alexander had entered the room, clad in his scorching red robes.

"Why such a dramatic exit, Daniel? You ran off as if you being held prisoner here."

"Is that so?" Daniel immediately spoke up, "then why did you send grunts to pursue me into the night?"

"That was a precautionary measure. It is dangerous to venture the woods of

Brennenburg in the absence of light. And you had no lights on you. I sent the grunt to bring you back without harm. I can see now that he may have misunderstood my demand." Alexander's voice stayed consistently smooth and controlled, as if nothing odd had happened in the past two days.

"It did not attack me. It dragged from Altstadt to here." Daniel finally had the mind to stand up and face Alexander like a man, rather than sit on the floor like a fool.

"Altstadt you say?" Alexander's tone changed to a curious air as his fingers cupped his chin in thought. "Pray tell what were you doing in that ramshackle village?"

Daniel was about to answer when instead he sealed his lips. Alexander lifted a brow in amusement.

"Learned to hold your tongue, have you?" He curled his lip mockingly.

"I will speak, and you will twist my words to your favor. It is your weapon of choice, is it not?"

"Words are the best weapon." He sneered.

Daniel's eyes narrowed in enmity.

He remembered the last time he encountered Alexander.

He was feigning sleep, and the baron had slid up against him, to molest him.

The outburst, the chase, everything flashed in his mind like a flurry of lightning.

And in that moment he felt power and anger course through his veins.

The Englishman jabbed a finger in the baron's direction.

"You!...*You*! You are at fault for my maddened departure!"

Alexander's expression remained unsatisfyingly stoic as he regarded the younger man with cold disdain.

"Daniel, please, you are under the influence of many sedatives for medical purposes. You could have easily imagined it or slipped into a lucid dream." He insisted.

"No!" Daniel shouted. "It was no dream! I know what happened to me! You- from the beginning of my stay here! I am not imagining these lewd advances!"

"Daniel try to calm down, nothing is resolved through anger."

Even as he said this, Alexander tensed and his eyes darkened. Daniel trembled in fury and anxiety.

"What you are doing-well what you have done is forbidden! *Taboo*!" his voice softened, trying to bring himself back to an alert state and out of the blurred madness.

The baron did have a point, remaining calm would serve him a better victory than blindly lashing out. For a moment the room was silent as Alexander gritted his teeth, his eyes a dangerous narrowed slit.

"And pray tell what exactly am I doing that is taboo?" his tone became sinister, much so that it brought Daniel right out of his anger.

His face softened in slight worry.

Before the baron could gain leverage from his lost dominance, he spoke again.

"You know what it is!" he said sternly.

Alexander took a daunting step in his direction. "You are engaging intimately with another man."

He bent his head slightly, hoping he was not blushing from embarrassment.

"Is that so?" Alexander snarled wickedly.

Daniel took a nervous step back.

He is going to kill me...

It was oppressively silent for what seemed like an eternity.

In a mere second, Alexander had lunged forward and slammed Daniel against the wall behind him. The baron's eyes were smoldering with rage and passion.

Daniel felt the breath knocked out of his lungs as his shaking arms went to hold Alexander back.

"I've been holed up this confounded castle with this mindless, shambling meat sacks for almost thirty years! Never in that time have I encountered another eligible human being."

The baron was taller than him by several inches, and his strength was impressive for a man of his age and stature.

It frightened Daniel.

"You'd be doing me a great kindness Daniel."

'kindness' slurred eerily in his sentence and Daniel shuddered as the man pressed against him.

"And hell, what guilt is there if you do not even remember this? I have Damascus rose oil for a reason!"

"Y-you cannot be serious!" Daniel cried. Alexander's head leaned quickly up next to Daniel's.

"I don't grant a painless experience...but what do I care?"

His neck bent as if in a spasm.

All sanity and reason had left this man in an instant, leaving Daniel with a shell of a human driven by depraved and violent urges.

I *cannot believe this is real! This cannot be happening!* Daniel thought in panic.

Suddenly and quite swiftly, Alexander's mouth joined Daniel's in a deep primal desire. Momentarily, the Englishman felt himself go limp in confusion, fear and reluctant arousal to the attention.

The baron's hands worked without pause, divesting Daniel of his trousers.

Reason returned to Daniel as he broke off the contact with Alexander.

"St-stop! What are you doing?" he wailed in a fearful tone.

"You know what I am doing." Alexander's course, rough voice shoved him back into that helpless panic.

With an irritated growl, the baron gripped Daniel's shirt and yanked him down the ground onto his back.

The older man fell atop him, pinning him below him as he aggressively joined their lips again.

Daniel tried to suppress his baser natures as the warmth of Alexander's mouth and tongue filled him.

The baron ripped his trouser right off his legs and tore off his underclothes, freeing Daniel from the fabrics.

He gave a frightened yelp and went to shove the baron away from him.

Alexander's fingers bit into the man's wrists and slammed them down.

The older man considered him for a brief moment through his clouded eyes and rolled him onto his stomach.

"No! Alexander! Please don't do this! I beg you!" he screamed.

Alexander tore down his pants and leaned over Daniel.

"I've heard begging for ten years. I am immune to it." He hissed.

With a thrust of his hips, he found his way inside the young man. Daniel gasped in pain and shock before screaming loud enough to burst his lungs.

Alexander gave a grunt of pleasure as he moved.

Each movement felt as if Daniel was being flayed with a hot iron.

His fingers clenched into fists as he held the carpet beneath him.

How did it come to this?

Slaver dripped from the corner of his mouth and landed below his cheek.

What did I ever do to deserve this? I should have never come to Brennenburg! I should've never trusted that vague damn letter!

He gasped again as Alexander gave a sudden thrust.

I'd rather be dead...I would have rather been shredded in the woods by those grunts. Even if they tore off my flesh bit by bit with their claws... Daniel's eyes squeezed themselves shut and he prayed this would not last long.

He was granted his wish.

He buried his face in the ground as Alexander gave a triumphant moan of pleasure and concluded his debauchery. The baron fell against him, chuckling wickedly. Their shirts prevented their skin from meeting.

"Thank you...Daniel..." he slurred, his nails digging into the young man's hips.

The baron withdrew from him, much to Daniel's discomfort, and rose.

Before vanishing from sight, he turned to look at the broken man.

"I almost forgot..." he reached into his robe pocket and pulled out a small vial filled with a dull rose colored liquid.

"This is for you..." he tossed it carelessly to the ground. It bounced soundlessly off the carpet and rolled up to Daniel's nose, making him flinch.

"We'll be in touch."

Were Alexander's parting words.

The Englishman stayed still for many minutes, listening to the sounds of the empty castle. Eventually, his eyes went to the vial sitting against his nose.

His hand reached it tentatively.

He wishes for me to forget this? All of his madness forgiven with this pitiful concoction? All of my pain and torment just forgotten in a spiraling swirl of amnesia?

Daniel's leg twitched. Anger began to seep into his mind again.

That bastard! I will not comply with his wretched desires any longer! I will kill him! Kill him!

Daniel lifted himself up and raised a clenched hand. He brought it down forcefully on the vial, smashing it beneath him.
Glass sank into his skin, biting deep and frightening him into a sudden blackness.

Daniel jerked violently and felt as if he was falling.

His fall was brief, however, for something hard and flat rested beneath him.

Struggling furiously through a suffocating darkness, he threw off a great clump of moist blankets wrapped tightly about him.

The space around him was well lit with the morning sun.

The Englishman froze.

His head turned cautiously.

This was not Alexander of Brennenburg's bedroom.

This was Daniel's small bedroom in the house that Herbert owned.

Slowly, he struggled to his feet through the entanglement of sheets.

On the side table, and the floor were numerous empty syringes.

The sedatives. His mind told him.

After several moments of standing confused by the bed, he remembered.

His dreams were plagued with evil most likely by the shadow in its attempts to contact him. When he visited Doctor Tate, he prescribed a sedative that would invoke a dreamless and peaceful sleep.

But only one a night would suffice.

Evidently, the amount taken the night before well exceeded one.

Daniel grumbled to himself and threw the glob of blankets onto the bed before picking up each syringe off the floor.

He counted fourteen.

The man disposed of them in a desk drawer for the time being. In time he would dispose properly of them. As he stretched his limbs by the desk he spied a letter, scarce in words on the surface. He bent down to examine it.

It was the correspondence he received from a Baron Alexander of Brennenburg castle. Images poured into Daniel's mind like a flood as he remembered the castle, the baron, the assault, everything slammed into his mind. He reeled back in fear that perhaps the baron was hiding beneath the bed, or in the wardrobe.

Come to Brennenburg castle. It read.

I will not!

Daniel grabbed the paper in his fingers, crumpling it angrily.

He crossed the room to the mantel of the fireplace and grabbed a tinderbox.

He threw the letter onto the blackened log and lit the letter aflame.

The fire ate hungrily at the parchment as it too blackened and disintegrated. Watching it gave him pleasure as well as an odd sense of freedom.

The fire died as it feasted on the last corner of the parchment.

Daniel sighed and rose.

It... it never happened...did it?

The room was silent and bright, giving a genuine sense of peace.

The Englishman opened the closet and prepared to dress for the day.

After he finished dressing he went back to the desk and wrote himself a small note.

Pack for Herbert's excavation in Egypt.

Go to Doctor Tate and cancel the sedatives.

In the corner, in small lettering, he wrote:

Do NOT go to Brennenburg castle.